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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the extent to which preservice teachers could differentiate developmentally appropriate from inappropriate practices in the education of young children. Responses to 2 teaching scenarios were collected from 158 junior and/or senior early childhood teacher education majors from a university in the mid-South. Results indicated that: (1) 75 percent of students correctly identified sharing personal experiences as a developmentally appropriate practice; (2) almost 75 percent correctly identified the inappropriateness of not permitting children to have recess and the presence of materials that were too difficult or abstract; (3) over half reported that overly structured classroom activities and reading a story in which children were not interested were inappropriate; (4) only 35 percent recognized the inappropriateness of discipline techniques which involved isolating children who were involved in minor misbehaviors; and (5) students exhibited difficulty in identifying children's cleaning up following a snack as an activity appropriate for young children. Faculty are urged to directly confront student misconceptions regarding current versus best practices. (Contains 21 references.) (JDD)

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Difficulty in Identifying Developmentally Appropriate Practices: Conflicts with Traditional Instructional Practices

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Abstract

Developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) comprise guidelines developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children regarding children's learning and development. Though taught as a central component of early childhood teacher education programs, no published research has examined preservice teacher training in DAP.

We investigated the extent to which 158 preservice teachers could differentiate developmentally appropriate from inappropriate practices. Responses to two teaching scenarios were collected from 158 junior and/or senior early childhood teacher education majors from a university in the Mid-South. Subjects were accurate in identifying some DAP and some inappropriate practices. Subjects exhibited significant difficulties in making inferences about DAP such as the participation of all children and cleaning up and in identifying some inappropriate practices. Implications are discussed.

Difficulty in Identifying Developmentally Appropriate Practices: Conflicts with Traditional Instructional Practices

Developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) comprise nationally sanctioned guidelines (National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, Bredekamp, 1990) regarding children's learning and development. These principles address issues dealing with staff, the importance of peers, grouping, student choice, discipline, environment, and activities and experiences necessary to enhance the development of children from birth through age 8 (Albrecht & Plantz, 1991). Though criticized for lack of specificity (Fowell & Lawton, 1992; Siegel & Hanson, 1990), these principles are taught as a central component of early childhood teacher education programs. That is, teacher education programs utilize the NAEYC guidelines as a tool upon which teachers should base their decisions as well as the selection of curricula to be implemented. Because of its recency (Bredekamp, 1990; Bredekamp, 1993), however, no published research is available that examines the training of preservice teachers in DAP.

Kostelnik (1992) noted that not everyone means the same thing when they use the term "DAP." She further noted that every

educational decision requires judgement by teachers and administrators concerning practices in the classroom. The studies of Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, and Hernandez (1990), and Mattke (1990) investigated teacher beliefs and/or philosophy and their practices within classrooms to determine congruencies between beliefs and practices. Both research studies (Charlesworth, et al., 1990; Mattke, 1990) indicated significant differences between philosophical beliefs and everyday practices (implementation). Mattke (1990) additionally noted that inappropriate teacher behavior and an inappropriate daily schedule can destroy a daily routine which was originally planned to address young children's needs. The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE, 1988) stated that "emphasis on drill and practice and worksheet-dictated curriculum is shockingly unstimulating to children and fails to extend their thinking" (p. 4). Some studies have indicated that although "moving toward DAP" appears to be emphasized across the country, inappropriate practices are very evident in classrooms despite the trend (Burts, D., Hart, Thomasson, Charlesworth, Fleege, & Mosley, 1990; Charlesworth et al., 1990; Lawler, 1988; Mattke, 1990).

Though very little empirical research regarding DAP is available (Bidne, 1989; Burts, et al.,1990; Charlesworth et al.,

1990), writings have addressed the practical applications of DAP, however (Bryant & Clifford, 1992; Elkind, 1989; Kostelnik, 1992, 1993; Lawler, 1990; Siegel & Hanson, 1990; Snider & Fu, 1990; Spodek, 1984; Wakefield, 1993). Additionally, Bredekamp and Shepard (1990) and Kostelnik (1992) addressed issues of "appropriateness" concerning entrance and placement; planning and individualizing the curriculum and instruction; and appropriate policies.

The purposes of this study were twofold: (1) To what extent can students correctly identify developmentally appropriate practices? (2) To what extent can students correctly identify developmentally inappropriate practices?

Method

Subjects were 158 junior and/or senior early childhood teacher education majors from a university in the Mid-South who were enrolled in an upper-level Elementary Education course during the spring and fall semesters of 1991 and spring of 1992 and 1993. Following classroom instruction on developmentally appropriate practices, observing children between 3 to 5 years of age, and teaching children through use of DAP, students were asked to read and analyze a teaching scenario adapted from Hipple (1975) entitled "Jingle, Jangle, Jungle." Students were asked to list

all developmentally appropriate activities and all developmentally inappropriate activities which were present in the scenario. The senior author, prior to analyzing student responses, developed a scoring key for both developmentally appropriate and developmentally inappropriate activities. Students' responses were compared to the key for accuracy.

Results

Table 1 shows the percentage of students who correctly identified the four DAP components present in the "Jingle, Jangle, Jungle" (Hipple, 1975) teaching scenario. The opening activity of sharing personal experiences was correctly identified by more than 75% of students. Students exhibited difficulty in identifying children's cleaning up following a snack as an activity appropriate for young children.

Insert Table 1 about here

When asked to specify inappropriate activities, almost 75% of students correctly identified not permitting children recess and the presence of materials that were too difficult or abstract (Table 2). Over half of students reported overly structured classroom activities and the inappropriateness of reading a story

in which children were not interested. Only 35%, however, recognized the inappropriateness of the discipline techniques which involved isolating children who were involved in minor misbehaviors. Even though affective objectives are an element in DAP, only 22% mentioned that the child(ren) with the sniffles should be comforted during rest time. Fifteen developmentally inappropriate activities were recognized as such by less than 10% of subjects.

Insert Table 2 about here

Discussion

Our sample of early childhood teacher education majors exhibited difficulty not only in recognizing major DAP activities, but, perhaps more importantly, in determining developmentally inappropriate activities. This occurrence may reflect that students are more familiar with traditional instructional practices now regarded as inappropriate for early childhood education (Burts, et al., 1990; Bredekamp & Shepard, 1990; Mattke, 1990; Snider, & Fu, 1990). That is, teacher behaviors such as requiring young children to sit still and quietly at their desks, though common in elementary schools (Burts, et al., 1990; Elkind,

1989; Katz, 1987; NASBE, 1988), are now recognized as developmentally inappropriate for young children (Bredekamp, 1993; Burts, et al., 1990; Charlesworth, et al., 1990; Kostelnik, 1992; Wakefield, 1993) Therefore, teacher education students have more experience, professionally and personally, with developmentally inappropriate than with developmentally appropriate practices. Thus, confusion may be created between best practices and current practices.

As indicated by Lawler's (1988) previous work, as well as Bidne (1989), and Snider and Fu (1990), preservice teachers need assistance in the areas of classroom management and organization of materials and equipment. Results of the current study indicated that preservice teachers' inferences regarding management scenarios was lacking. Preservice programs need greater emphasis on classroom management and their developmentally appropriate methods for implementation (Lawler, 1988; Snider & Fu, 1990).

Generalizations from our study are, of course, tenuous because our findings are based on a relatively small sample size of teacher education majors from a single university in the Mid-South. Though additional research is essential to ascertain generalizability, faculty in teacher education programs should be

sensitive to the possibility of difficulties in differentiating DAP from inappropriate practices. Faculty may be well advised to directly confront student misconceptions regarding current versus best practices.

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Table 1

Developmentally Appropriate Practices Correctly Identified

DAP activity	Percentage Correct
Opening activity of sharing	77
Play activities involving student choice	58
Cleaning up	28
Story time	13

Table ?

Developmentally Inappropriate Practices Correctly Identified

Developmentally Inappropriate Activity	Percentage Correct
Not permitting children to go outside	74
Materials and activities too difficult/abstract	73
Overly structured classroom activities	63
Continued reading story even though children were not interested	59
No activity for children who completed task early	52
Insufficient concrete materials - manipulatives - hands-on activities	44
Hurrying children to complete the activities	42
Overly rigid and inappropriate discipline	35
Not comforting child(ren) with sniffles during rest time	22
Lack of orderly process for departure	15
Forcing children to sit still	9
No flexibility in classroom activities	9
Childrens' interests and needs not considered	9
Inadequate transition between activities	7
Insufficient interaction among students	6
Teacher not planned or organized	5

Insufficient balance between activities (i.e., passive-active, quiet-loud, teacher-students)	3
Activities not related	3
Inadequate free choice time	3
Negative teacher's mood/attitude	2
Day went wrong - all fun at beginning of day	1
Environment not creative or child-centered	1
Lesson not interesting or motivating	1
Lack of opportunity to practice divergent thinking skills	0
Insufficient interaction with teacher	0